Indeterminate classifications: being 'more than kin' in Kazakhstan

Catherine Alexander

Introduction

Estimates diverge on how many Kazakhs were living outside Kazakhstan in 1991, when the new Republic emerged from the Soviet Union. The World Association of Kazakhs (WAK) suggests 5 million, the International Organisation for Migration's (IOM) more conservative figure was 2 million. Both figures are thrown into sharp relief by Kazakhstan's 1989 census data that identified only 6.5 million Kazakhs internally, 39 percent of the overall population. These numbers and fractions matter: how they are counted and their effect on people's lives.

How we recognize or deny other people is fundamental to the formation, negotiation and negation of social relationships. What concerns me here is first, how such recognition operates through nation-state narratives and bureaucratic modes of knowing such as counting and classification and, second, the entailments of these representational forms. How is it that counting and statistics, so central to modern statecraft, can render people visible and calculable on the one hand, and yet inimical to containment and integration into a national or civic whole on the other? I argue that these apparently precise forms of knowing are profoundly indeterminate approximations of what they purport to know. This then builds on recent debates on what might be called the biopolitics and consequences of counting (e.g. Nelson, 2016 and Merry, 2016). By juxtaposing such modes of accounting with how they are encountered, complex and varied experiences of indeterminacy appear as lives exceed or fall between the categories and narratives that seek to nail them down. Since mass migrations often foreground such demographic politics, I examine this through migrations from and to Kazakhstan over the last century, particularly since 1991.

This chapter explores, partly via the politics of nation and state making in Kazakhstan, how proportional, multiple and overlapping demographic categories function at different levels with different consequences. This also invites a closer examination of value ranges *within* a

given category. Population statistics, numbers, algorithims and the categories they enumerate seem to promise precision and thence control, but are only proxies for complex human lives and relationships. Narratives concerning the march of nations through History are similarly prone to selectivity and omission. Kazakhstan is no exception, presenting a chronicle of Soviet subjugation and subsequent Kazakh independence that has been neatly razored into a rather parsimonious, monochrome view of the recent past. But such apparent clarity hazards only a partial representation. Arguably, such incomplete accounts act as technologies of connection, weaving together imagined social wholes from constituent parts. But by looking at the gaps created, or unreflected by these approaches, multiple forms of indeterminacy appear.

Oralman ('repatriate' in Kazakh) have been actively and formally welcomed back to Kazakhstan over the last twenty-five years as 'brothers living abroad' (*shette zhurgen qandastar – qan* meaning blood in Kazakh) via a government-sponsored repatriation programme. Written into both terms is the implication of a band of brothers, common ethnicity, blood kinship, but this story of return also raises questions of what belonging, relatedness and integration mean. They are often mocked by urban Kazakhs (and Russians) for a perceived lack of modern, urbane polish and have frequently found themselves in a bureaucratic void waiting, sometimes for years, for promised citizenship papers. Shocked by their acculturated, ancestral homeland, many have formed separate communities with other oralman, returned to their host land, or maintained complex, transboundary kin networks across and between host and homeland. In this last case, they inhabit 'a limbo between settler and visitor' (Basch, Glick Schiller and Blanc, 1994) that challenges concepts of citizenship, nationhood and the very notion of a territorially-bounded nation-state.

Scholarly literature (e.g. Diener, 2005; Cerny, 2010; Laruelle, 2016:174) and media reports abound on the failures of oralman 'integration', generally seen from politico-bureaucratic perspectives, occasionally from those of oralman themselves, rarely from internal migrants and continuously-settled urban citizens of Kazakhstan. Schneider and Crul remind us that 'integration' typically emphasizes the 'structural aspects of incorporation into society' (2010: 1145) aligning migrants from different backgrounds with a host country, attempting equality

without uniformity.[1] Nevertheless, integration and incorporation both imply a social whole of which migrants (including returnees) are to be part. There is a shared root with integer and integrity after all: a whole number and the quality of being untainted. Repatriates can aggravate such assumptions, revealing holes in place of wholes where incommensurate worlds co-exist, and questioning similarity and difference.

Anti-oralman sentiment peaked in 2011 in Zhanaozen in East Kazakhstan on the 20th Anniversary of the Republic's Independence Day (see also Keskula this vol.). There were protests against poor working conditions, which ended in violent clashes with the police and citizens' deaths. Later, locals accused oralman of instigating the unrest. Some analyses accepted the claims, casting the protests as a consequence of marked socio-economic inequalities between wealthy foreigners and impoverished Kazakhs in the oil regions (Satpayev and Umbetaliyeva, 2015). Others suggested accusations were exaggerated (Oka, 2013: 8), while Kazakh nationalists attacked 'oralman-phobia' (ibid.). Although no connection was formally made, the repatriation programme was cut, the Internal Minister saying the government had 'lost track' of the oralman: it was known that actual numbers exceeded official quotas and projections though nobody knew by how much. Two years later the programme was restarted after events in the Ukraine. Fears that Russian-dominated areas of Kazakhstan might secede or welcome Russian intervention (Diener, 2015) prompted a government move to place oralman in such regions, a numerical deterrent.

This seeming inability to descry, track and count individuals is a common anti-representational manoeuvre used against immigrants. A decade earlier in Almaty, Kazakhstan's former capital, I often heard rural immigrants to the cities described as an 'invisible virus' (Alexander, 2008).[2] Such metaphors dehumanize people just as the common tropes deployed against immigrants describe them as a formless, liquid mass: they surge, flood or pour into countries in waves threatening to engulf and destroy economic and social order; as such they are intractable to enumeration. Other such metaphors also evoke animals (swarm, flock, plague) thus breaking down distinctions between human and non-human, denying recognition of shared humanity and the possibility of social encounter. Nonetheless, as Nelson (2015) so vividly shows in the context of Guatemalan state violence, the apparent

objectivity of 'counting' techniques can also displace or flatten social complexity and humanity.

What are we to make of these conflicting, shifting ways of understanding the oralman's situation, by turns welcomed, repudiated, resented, abandoned—and apparently lost track of? The oralman are one of many groups of people who became explicitly unwelcome in their host countries, when national borders appeared or hardened after the fall of the Soviet Union. As the ethnography below shows, however, for many, the sense of that larger Soviet order continues to shape lived worlds, much as many post-colonial contexts continue to be partly formed by the regimes they nominally displaced

Reverse diasporas, particularly in the 20th century,[3] are relatively common and well documented as empires (including the Soviet Union) fell and new countries (re)formed often with aggressively xenophobic policies, or non-titular ethnic groups fled fearing persecution or hoping for a better life. In some instances, people have been officially welcomed back, even sought out by the 'home' government as with Russia (Flynn, 2003), Germany (Brown, 2005, Darieva, 2005) and Israel (Eisenstadt, 1954). Alongside these have been returns of people who originally moved for economic reasons (e.g. Constable, 1999 on ambivalent Filipina returns; Cerase 1970 on Italian repatriates). Many of these have been multigenerational diasporas, raising questions about what 'return' and 'homeland' mean. The experience of such returnees has been varied. As Sancak (2016) reports for Germans in Kazakhstan, some choose to remain where they are on hearing reports from repatriates about disappointing reception. Ethnic identity formation may well be a dialectical process between smaller ethnic groups and larger social institutions (Nagel, 1994) but certain moments crystallize definitions of ethnicity, especially when they unlock citizenship and its attendant rights. But some homeland states have found it hard to determine what constitutes a particular ethnicity when many conventional markers have been lost or diluted such as linguistic capacity or knowledge of tradition. In turn, multigenerational returnees can experience a sense of not quite fitting in either host or homeland.

Many of these factors resonate with the oralman, as discussed below. But there are also distinct features. Two other homelands appear alongside host and titular country. The Soviet Union continues to frame notions of moral community and belonging for many and, as Dubuisson and Genina (2012), Diener (2009) and Genina (2015) describe for Mongolian Kazakhs, homelands can also be understood in terms of mobility as well as the land itself (summarized by Yessenova 2005 as 'roots and routes'), confronting head on the containment and stasis on which modern state control is premised.

What interests me here are the questions the oralman provoke on answering the call to return because here too, they appear excessive on a range of counts: they are out of time, they do not fit the newly imagined national community of highly-skilled professionals, they challenge the very notion of what it means to be Kazakh plus that of a modern nation-state as bounded, contiguous territory. Such questions and their entailments are unsettling. One such consequence raised by returning Kazakhs is not just the metricisation of the population (how many of each ethnic group) but the further qualification of ethnicity. If they exceed the criteria for being kin, as I suggest below, the question appears of what that means for those who remained.

Indeterminacy appears throughout this account in several registers. First, the state (officials, documents, legal categories, definitions and procedures) can seem illegible, resistant to encounter for oralman trying to obtain papers. This is mirrored by the oralman being pictured in the media and by government spokesmen as intractable to representation—numberless, paperless—and hence recognition as a 'full' or at any rate juridical person. Second, the oralman can disturb the temporalities at play in carefully crafted national progress narratives from a fixed past to a desired future; both in and out of time, they seem uncanny. Third, their presence exposes numbers and categories as proxies, partial representations of reality, essentially indeterminate. Their situation indicates a fuzzy logic that transcends binary classification structures by enabling a perspective that is 'more or less', a question of degree—and which thus challenges familiar modes of statistical statehood. It shows how counting can discount people. Last, the experience and effects of these different kinds of indeterminacy vary from threat to freedom to poverty and exclusion. For some, lacking

official papers translates as constraint; but others remake and redefine social relationships outside the state, implicitly rejecting its determining authority. Some of these modalities appear as ambiguity. I am, however, restricting the use of this term to where an object, person or event holds more than one contradictory interpretations such as apparently being 'then' and 'now'. This does not account for all the registers listed above.

This chapter therefore offers a critique of familiar analytic framings (e.g. Scott 1985, 1990, 2009) which are based on distinctions between state efforts at determinacy on the one hand, usually cast in a negative light (as inscribing power and marginalising those who do not fit), and indeterminacy on the other, which appears as resistance, political or economic freedom and is seen as 'good'. By tracing indeterminacy's multiple forms ethnographically, and how people conceptualize them, such analytical normativities are questioned and complicated. Seen through symbolic (e.g. Ryan, 2013 following Kristeva 1982) or biopolitical (e.g. Giroux, 2006 following Foucault, 2003) analytical lenses, the oralman may be seen as 'humans-as-waste' (McFann, n.d.). Yet such a category fails to account for the fact that they are also valorized as insiders, may highlight the inauthenticity of the rejecting powers or may themselves spurn the category-making state.

The ethnography below moves through several perspectives on indeterminacy shaped by my fieldwork since 2000 in Almaty's informal peri-urban settlements and central residential districts, as well as with city and district administrations. Thus, after a brief background of why the new Republic's future direction and government was initially uncertain, the chapter moves from high-level national narratives, strategies and population counts through the legal minutiae of definitional criteria for oralman, and the views of rural and urban citizens on their new/old neighbors to the experiences of oralman themselves. I conclude by drawing out the unnerving implications of making the oralman vital to the nationalist enterprise for Kazakhstan and the Kazakhs who stayed behind.

Population politics: tensions between nationalist and civic statehood

Kazakhstan has a long history of being a place of political exile, labour camps, mass deportations and pioneering settlement from the rest of the Russian/Soviet empire. Partly as a result, population politics are fraught. When the new Republic emerged in 1991, its legitimacy and viability were uncertain. The titular nation comprized less than half the population[4] potentially questioning the right of Kazakhs to dominate government. This was further complicated by uneven geographical distribution: there are concentrations of Kazakhs in the south, but the north and west are dominated by non-Kazakhs, particularly Russians. In the end, boundaries, defined during the Soviet 1920s, largely stayed put[5] and became naturalized into nation-state narratives of primordial links between blood and land. Kazakhstan's future as a nation-state was therefore not a given in 1991. From many possible future trajectories, an indeterminate future, a national narrative had to be swiftly crafted that legitimized a Kazakh-led government.

There are many reasons for the comparatively small size of this titular group. As nomadic grazing lands were eroded from the 17th century onwards with Russian colonial settlement, some Kazakh groups moved to China and Mongolia. During the Soviet period, some Kazakhs simply found themselves outside the new Socialist Republic's borders. Others fled political persecution. The *zhut*, a late Spring freeze, in 1920-21 reduced the Kazakh population further as thousands died or escaped the ensuing famine. Forced collectivization and sedenterisation 1929-1933 caused further famine and emigration to adjacent countries and then further afield (Kendirbaeva, 1997; Mendikulova, 1997). Conservative estimates suggest the Kazakh population decreased by a third (Pianciola, 2001; Rudnytskyi et al., 2015). The ethnic imbalance was exacerbated by a continuous inflow of deportees, prisoners, settlers and workers (Westren, 2012; Barnes, 2011).

The independent Republic inherited, and continued to experience, the effects of these population movements as millions of non-Kazakhs returned to their own motherlands (Rahmonova-Schwartz, 2010). The emigration of Slavs and Germans in particular meant that the population tumbled from seventeen to fifteen million, provoking concern about the depletion of the workforce in general but especially professional and technical skills, often linked to Russians.

For a Kazakh government to lay claim to Kazakhstan demanded a clear identification of people and land. At the same time, celebrations for the new nation-state were tempered so as not to alienate the substantial Russian community. Such public discourse carefully celebrates the uniqueness of Kazakhstan as the Kazakhs' homeland while stating that all ethnicities are equal. In practice, such internationalism wears a Kazakh face as it once wore a Russian one (Schatz, 2004: 75-8; Keskula, this vol). Power is largely in the hands of elite Kazakhs.[6] President Nazarbaev's declaration, prefacing the 2050 National Strategy, is deftly vague: 'Kazakhstan is our land. It is a land that has belonged to our ancestors. The land that will belong to our descendants. ... We must be the true owner of our land—hospitable, friendly, generous and tolerant' (Kazakhstan2050). Thus he claims the country belongs to Kazakhs by ancestral right—and is multiethnic, suggesting that the much-vaunted tradition of hospitality welcomes all groups. But a guest is not the same as the legitimate co-owner of the land.

The new Republic was thus ushered in on the dual claims of both civic- and nation-based statehood (Kuşçu, 2008: 8; Beacháin, 2013; Kudaibergenova, 2015) which continue to tug in different directions and shape how the population and its sub-groups are counted and valued. Both the 2030 and 2050 National Strategies follow a Soviet-inflected rhetoric of Progress, albeit with a different endpoint. Thus a trajectory is outlined from a traditional nomadic past, where the country is 'the cradle of Kazakh civilization', to a modern democracy where a highly-educated workforce will ensure the country is a global economic player in a transnational knowledge-based economy (Kazakhstan2050.com), echoing China's emphasis on developing human capital (Greenhalgh, 2010). Thus, while both civic and national models stress the need for a larger workforce, the civic model foregrounds professional capacity, while nationalists lean towards increasing numbers of Kazakhs. This double narrative, which has shifted in emphasis over time, has ambiguity woven through it, paving the way for different emphases at different junctures.

In 1999, President Nazarbaev announced that the overall population was to reach 20million by 2030, provoking many jokes that were either ribald or alluded to popular concerns: 'the only way to achieve the President's goal,' the jokes ran, 'is to wait for a power blackout and

count; open the borders to China or ask whoever counts election votes to do the census'. Suspicion of counting has a long history. Nazarbaev has been cautious about explicitly calling for the proportion of Kazakhs to increase, but this was inferred by many of my informants and Presidential speeches on increasing overall numbers have been made to the WAK while discussing oralman.

One measure in 1992 to address the ethnic imbalance and/or low overall numbers, was the call for expatriate Kazakhs to return. This would not only increase numbers, but would also foreground the afflictions of Kazakhs in the Soviet era: oralman were originally defined as those who had left because of Stalinist persecution. Increased numbers *and* redress for past suffering legitimize both the Kazakh-dominated government and preferential treatment accorded to Kazakhs. Emphasizing the need for reparation to the Kazakh people also serves to distance the present regime from the Soviet past, even though old elites often still hold power,[7] fudging sameness into apparent difference. This focus emphasizes Kazakh victims, Russian perpetrators. History is abridged into a simple tale of tyranny by outsiders out of which the contemporary land and people have resurfaced (cf. Grant, 2001). Such is the format of Almaty's Museum of the Repression where Russian-speaking Kazakh attendants switch to Kazakh while showing visitors round exhibits, gliding past photographs suggesting some Kazakhs were also involved in identifying state enemies, pausing in front of waxworks of Kazakhs fleeing for their lives. Apparent clarity can be deceptive.

The claim of Kazakhs to the land is further emphasized through constant references to the Republic as 'primordial Kazakh territory' e.g. in the Constitution (Cummings, 2005: 84). Public celebrations and the media have made much of Kazakh traditional dress, music, language and festivals in the quest to cement the present to an authentic past (Dave, 2007). The government has invested heavily in the local film industry, backing films such as *Nomad* (2005), which shows Ablai Khan uniting Kazakh tribes in the 18th century. The film indicates the beginning of Kazakh statehood with 'markers of Kazakh identity … throughout the film: the widescreen steppe, dombras, the nomadic past, … tribal rituals and practices' (Isaacs, 2016: 147-8). Subsequent films have centred on Soviet nuclear experimentation in Kazakhstan and the traditional hospitality of Kazakh villagers to deported strangers in *A Gift*

for Stalin (2008) and *Zheruiyk* (2011). A nomadic past leaves few material remains (Cummings, 2005), but those on Kazakh soil have been yoked to the nationalist cause (Alexander, 2004), while the new capital's architecture and interior decoration summon ersatz nomadic imagery alongside a futuristic imaginary (Laszczkowski, 2016). Numerical volume would add some heft to assertions of the primordial rights of Kazakhs to Kazakhstan.

Oralman were originally pictured as erstwhile victims returning from this ruptured time of eternal stasis. Laruelle and Peyrouse (2004) suggest that unlike other diaspora, often seen to be *lacking* genuine qualities of the home nation, oralman were seen as *adding* authenticity to the performance of national identity through their apparent closeness to Kazakh traditions, culture, language, history. Kuşçu spells this out: 'According to the nationalists, demographic preponderance of the Kazakhs, which would be made possible by the mass migration of the 'culturally and linguistically pure' Kazakhs of the diaspora, is a guarantee for sustaining the legitimacy of the ethno-national entitlement for the state and territory.' (2008: 100). The terms bear attention. The question of proportional classification begins to emerge, whether one can be 'more' or 'less' Kazakh.

Along these lines, local scholar, Ismagambetov, criticized the tendency to cast oralman as increasing the proportion of 'pure' Kazakh population and enforce 'purely Kazakh values' (2009). Noting that some oralman retained links with the countries from where they had come, he said they might be seen as not working in Kazakhstan's interests at all, suggesting, rather darkly, that there were 'oralman and oralman'. Nonetheless, Ismagambetov highlights, albeit oddly, that 'oralman' is an inadequate category for capturing vastly different biographies and experiences as well as indicating the possibility that the nationalist ideal of authenticity may appear as a gradient, not an absolute at the level of both the population and the person.

There is a particular local shading to the idea of acculturated Kazakhs. The National Strategies' splicing of timeless pasts to modern futures echoes Chinghiz Aitmatov's famous novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Thousand Years* (1983). Here the 'simple wisdom' of local Kyrgyz earthbound tradition is juxtaposed with the Soviet space age, the implication

being that such modernity is inimical to tradition. One of the novel's central themes is that of the *mankurt*, a figure purportedly taken from Kyrgyz legend. Driven mad by torture, the *mankurt* forgets who he is, to whom he belongs and so becomes an automaton, a less-than-human slave. The term has entered everyday speech to indicate a Kazakh alienated from her own culture and people. Urbanized Kazakhs may use it ironically or somewhat mournfully about themselves, as in the case of one of my regular informants, an economist, Nurzhan, who observed sadly that while he was a *mankurt*, his daughters at least had been taught Kazakh at school and were thus 'better' Kazakhs then their parents. Rural and repatriate Kazakhs use the term mockingly about acculturated, urban Russophone Kazakhs. In the early 1990s it was used to account for some successful Kazakh businessmen who were able to leap at speculative opportunities that suited neither traditional Kazakh nor Soviet values precisely because such people were *mankurt*, betwixt and between. The wife of a rural migrant to Almaty turned wealthy businessman, described her husband as *mankurt*, a 'non person', saying that he had been able to seize opportunities in the 1990s precisely because he was unshackled by any rules. The term '*mankurt*', in its popular usage encapsulates the doubleness of indeterminacy in the sense of gaps between categories of belonging. The entrepreneur literally seizes value from such openings but such freedom can also be a loss of self or negative freedom, where the person is formed through connections, not gaps.

Counting is clearly not straightforward. Population growth overall is required to enhance the labour force. Within that number, however, different narratives privilege educational and professional capacity, on the one hand, or ethnicity on the other, which may or may not overlap. But reverting to the level of the person being so counted and classified, a 'more' or 'less' understanding of authenticity begins to rear its head. Oralman, as the next section shows, are not only sometimes defined as incarnating a greater degree of 'pure' Kazakhness than others, but also unwanted, 'non-essential' features.

Defining oralman

Definitions of oralman have added to their indeterminate condition on two counts. First the abundance of different definitions can be hard to understand or open up gaps between them (cf Reno this vol.). Second, each definition (whether legal, regulatory, media or demotic) is partial. Simply put, the government's overt aim was to increase the number of Kazakhs (and the overall population) by fast tracking repatriation. But, at this point, counting becomes difficult because: there are many versions of how many ethnic Kazakhs are outside Kazakhstan, legal definitions of oralman have been mutable, and many have returned informally or continue to track to and fro. Clarity has been further muddied by constantly changing quota definitions. In practice, such proportional classification suggests that nowadays there is a wrong and a right kind of Kazakh.

The 1992 Migration Law[8] specified the right to return for all Kazakhs living abroad and all citizens whose ancestors had left because of Stalinist repressions. The 1997 amendment retained the emphasis of redressing Soviet wrongs but narrowed the definition to 'a person of native ethnicity (*litso korennoi natsional'nosti*) who was expelled from the historic homeland because of political oppression'.[9] This excluded those whose ancestors had simply been outside Kazakhstan's newly-defined borders in the 1920s. Many of these also sought return. The 2002 amendment reflected practice by redefining oralman as 'foreign or stateless citizens of Kazakh ethnicity, who permanently resided outside … Kazakhstan when it obtained sovereignty'.

The 2011 revision marked a significant shift requiring documentary evidence of Kazakh ethnicity *and* prioritising those with higher education and skills (Oka 2013: 2-6). Recent amendments thus increasingly emphasize the ability to contribute economically: acquired rather than ascribed characteristics, redefining what kind of Kazakh is welcome. This was fleetingly made explicit in the President's 2012 comment that 'the oralman had yet to show their worth' (Oka, 2013). The various values embodied by the oralman thus appear as different orders of worth: rights through suffering, economic capacity, association with the land, and incarnation of the Kazakh past.

Even if definitional criteria are met, quotas were set early on limiting the number of households to be given financial and other assistance: work, housing and citizenship papers which provide access to welfare, education, good jobs and voting rights. Partly depending on the state's economic reserves, quota numbers have varied significantly year-on-year since the programme began (Diener 2009: 227). Mutable definitions of quota eligibility, however, introduced another raft of qualifications for who counts, again increasingly emphasising skills.

Those not 'in quota' receive no formal assistance, although they can apply to be in the next quota. Further, they frequently have no housing, jobs nor the official papers that will allow them to work or reside in the city legally, have access to education, pensions or healthcare. But not all 'in quota' oralman receive promised help either. The Migration Committee has been riddled with corruption scandals about the diversion of allocated monies and housing, or oralman being placed in remote deserted townships. While corruption can be difficult to pin down, the official heading Almaty's Migration Committee during my fieldwork in 2000 was eventually sacked after a series of complaints; her disgruntled deputy told me his boss sent her children to school in England (a sign of wealth) and to observe her diamond-be-ringed fingers.[10]

The number of oralman registering their intention to settle permanently but without quota has hugely exceeded projections. By 2001, the quota of 607 families was exceeded 15 times; in 2004 the quota of 10,000 families was exceeded by 84% (UNDP, 2006: 10). In 2007, the government reported 7,538 persons without citizenship from CIS countries and 449 from other countries registered as stateless. The actual numbers are likely to be considerably higher. Many of these individuals have disappeared below the state radar. Marriages and births are not recorded. The number of stateless individuals lacking passports, residential papers and the right to work legally has risen. Many also regularly move between Kazakhstan and other countries. None of the oralman families I met in Almaty's shanty towns 2000-2010 was registered, although by 2016 more had acquired papers. Local NGOs, municipal officials and the IOM suggest figures for non-quota repatriates may be double official statistics which state that 957,772 oralman returned 1991-2016 (The Ministry of Health Care, 2014).[11]

‘Losing track’, as the Internal Minister said after the Zhanaozen protests, begins to seem rather an understatement.

Despite scandals around lack of support, other media stories, which reported oralman being given jobs and benefits, fuelled resentment towards them, particularly during the economic crises of the 1990s and after 2008. Such stories often turned on the oralman for apparently manipulating the system: renting out allocated housing and claiming benefits for their vast families (see also Diener, 2009).

The divide between urban and rural Kazakhs is marked. Yessenova (2005) notes that villagers continue to be seen as hindering progress to ‘an advanced state of being’. While, in the Kazakh-language press, the countryside is cast as the ‘cradle’ of Kazakh culture and impoverished villagers treated with compassion, urbanites see young rural migrants in the cities (and out of place) as ‘morally immature… professionally underqualified … confused … inhabitants of urban slums.’ (2005: 665). In other words, the ancient double duality between town and city[12] is rehearsed again in Kazakhstan, but accentuated when oralman are brought into the equation. Oralman are often unwelcome in Almaty’s peri-urban settlements where many settled alongside Kazakh migrants from rural areas, each wave of migrants frequently rejecting the next.

Rural migrants often mock oralman. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Almaty’s informal peri-urban settlements were largely populated by young couples or single workers from villages where parents remained, looking after their grandchildren. These recent internal migrants often declared about their oralman neighbors that, ‘They’re different from us; they’re not like us.’ The discourse of difference was consistent. Young women I talked to were quick to point out what they claimed to be physical dissimilarity. Thus, giggling, two teachers in their early twenties from Narynkol in the east of Kazakhstan, told me that oralman from China were easily spotted as they had red cheeks, ‘just like Chinese people!’ Later they gestured towards a neighbor, recently arrived from Uzbekistan and who, they insisted, had a ‘pointy face’ rather than the correct Kazakh ‘moonface’. Later, asking other migrants from Narynkol, what

they meant by this 'difference', an outburst of examples was given: 'they dress in old-fashioned clothes', said one. Another that, 'they smell weird because they eat different food from us—and they speak funny Kazakh.' Alibek, a young man working as a porter in Baraholka and hoping to save enough to study for a degree, observed that, 'Oralman are very religious, too religious'. These are all familiar markers of the stranger.

<< insert 7.1 Migrants from Narynkol in 2000. Author's own photo.>>

Longer-standing, urban, Russophone Kazakhs often employ a similar lexicon to speak of rural migrants and repatriates alike: 'They take our jobs'. 'They're dirty.' 'They're not like us.' 'They have too many children.' A jocular exchange over dinner between a middle-class couple in Almaty is instructive. Laughingly chastising her husband for lack of manners as he ate with his fingers, Aigerim, the wife, said to me, 'He's from Shymkent. Can you tell? They're our rednecks. TEXAN!' she shouted at him, and then again, '*mambet*!'[13] Her husband riposted, 'Kholkhoznik!' before she ended the rally of insults with her final putdown: 'Oralman!'

The language of rejection is telling. First, the markers of difference are familiar from European xenophobia, dirtiness as opposed to cleanliness (Agarin, 2014; Eriksen and Thorfeisson this vol). Low employment is a continuing concern, provoking resentment of incomers with jobs. Excessive fertility is a familiar trope in racist discourse indicating a lack of discipline and control threatening to swamp local populations. Again, the distinction between edibility and non-edibility is another classic marker of structural distinction. But as I discuss in the final section, other tropes go beyond binary distinctions.

In other words, oralman have become shorthand for a lack of progressive modern civilization (while simultaneously strengthening claims to the 'cradle of Kazakh civilization') but are also threatening in their familiar incongruity. For long-standing, urban Kazakh citizens, incoming rural migrants are bad enough, but the repatriates jar all those appeals to the past by seemingly embodying the past in the present where it has no business to be. 'I know we are all one people,' Natalya, a Kazakh teacher mused, 'and I should pity them for being

backward and feel they are my people—but I don't really like them and I don't want them in my city.' She was exactly the sort of person who might be described as *mankurt:* Russian-speaking, only possessed of 'kitchen Kazakh', Soviet educated. Natalya's comment, recapitulating those of the migrants from Narynkol, brings abstract population politics down to earth when numbers and characteristics become unwanted neighbors. The derogatory names cast by urban and non-urban dwellers at each other suggest multiple, incommensurate imaginaries of desired national communities.

Oralman's reasons for return

Many oralman find themselves caught in multiple conditions of indeterminacy whether unable to engage effectively with state officials and processes or tolerated but neither in nor out of the law, which, in turn, blocks access to citizenship rights. They have many reasons for returning. Some have escaped poverty, discrimination, environmental catastrophes or political repression, especially in China and Uzbekistan. In common with other return migrations of multi-generational diaspora, the homeland was usually idealized and frozen at the point at which it was left. Most thus add that they wanted to come back to their historic motherland, the land of their ancestors, to be buried in the land of their clans, to speak Kazakh and lead the life of a Kazakh on the land, keeping animals. These reasons were highlighted more by families who left reasonable security and good jobs, especially from China.

They have had mixed fates. Some are content. One such was a forty-year old former Geography teacher from Ürümqi whose ancestors had left Kazakhstan in 1917. He sold his house and moved his family to Almaty in 2010, with no quota, renting a room on arrival. He had rapidly gained a place in the quota queue, been given promised documents and used the money from the sale of his house to set up as a highly successful builders' merchant in one of Almaty's new peri-urban districts, building himself a fine house in the process.

Others feel they were sold short by the government's empty promises or found themselves disorientated by a historic motherland which no longer resembles the land of their parents' or grandparents' tales, or indeed has Kazakh as a common language, particularly in the Russophone cities. The older generation is often unable to communicate, having returned with, for example, Kazakh and Chinese. Moreover, their Kazakh is often dated and with accents that mark them as 'foreign'; they are ridiculed for speaking an 'old' or even 'pre-revolutionary' language. Even in the southern rural areas of Kazakhstan where Kazakh is more commonly spoken, it is often intermixed with Russian words and new coinages. The script is still modified Cyrillic.[14] Those whose families left Kazakhstan before the 1920s write Kazakh in an Arabic script, those coming from Turkey use the modified Latin alphabet.

Bewilderment is common, especially among some who arrived outside the quota hoping for acceptance on arrival and to be included in the next quota.[15] Many found themselves beached on a reef of unresponsive bureaucracy, waiting years to join the quota queue or for financial help and promised papers. In an interview in 2002, the local IOM representative reported many instances where passports had been removed on the promise of Kazakh replacements, which then failed to appear. Keeping animals is rarely practicable where many rural collectives farms have collapsed or been abandoned to grandparents and small children. Most moved to the big cities: 'at least in Almaty,' a young Kazakh woman from Uzbekistan said, 'you'll always find something to eat.'

Many oralman live in the settlements that sprang up around Almaty in the late 1980s. << **insert 7.2 One of Almaty's informal settlements in 2000. Author's photo>>** These places have a nebulous quality. Tenure is often insecure. Deeds that were nominally granted officially have been overturned. Some inadvertently bought fake deeds, a common scam. While some areas have become formalized, others have had shacks destroyed in police raids (Alexander, 2018). A property lawyer in Almaty explained to me that the status of these regions remained, 'an open question'. The legality of these settlements and the people who live in them appears suspended. In this sense, these lives and places echo the refugee camps described by Turner (2005) where Agamben's (2004) notion of permanent exceptionality plays out as suspended time, an unfurling present, except that many oralman are not

physically contained in camps but made into a shadowy presence through lack of papers. The state cannot see except through documentary representation (Alexander, 2007). In turn, the *sans papieres* cannot make themselves visible, their dwellings and families secure, without documents.

Anara, now in her early 90s, returned without quota from Karapalkstan in north Uzbekistan with her daughter and grandchildren in 2005. As a child, in 1921, she had gone with her village on the long march south from the *zhut*:

> 'We walked. We walked and walked. My father carried me. Most of the animals had died by then. You could see the grass beneath the ice but they couldn't get at it. Animals and people died on the way from starvation.
>
> Sometimes we ate the dead animals but we couldn't dig through the ice to bury the people, so we threw their bodies into mountain crevasses. Some people fought the animals for grass when we found it. Sometimes we found old pumpkins and tried to eat them but they made people and animals swell up so much it killed them.
>
> Very few of us made it to Karakalpakstan.'

She sat outside their mud house on a rusty old bedframe, swinging her legs, looking down the hill to Almaty. She was in a rage of incomprehension. How was it, she said, after so much hardship, a lifetime working for the Soviet Union and bringing up eight children she was unwelcome in her own land? She was penniless as she was unable to claim a pension from Uzbekistan where she had worked all her life for the state. What was this state, she said, that did not look after the people who had worked for it? For all she railed against it, the overarching Soviet state still defined her sense of citizenship through labour, eclipsing changes in time and borders. Thus, refracting the state discourse of redress, Anara claimed her suffering demanded reparation from the current state as a manifestation in the present of the Soviet state. Such a take is relatively common among older citizens. The co-existent

worlds suggested by Anara's account and other narratives of the Kazakh state's re-emergence and progress scarcely mesh, provoking bewilderment.

<< insert 7.3 Repatriate Kazakhs from Karakalpakstan in 2000. Author's photo>>

Her neighbors, a Chinese Kazakh family, had returned without quota in 2006 selling everything they had, crossing the border and buying land with a shack on Almaty's outskirts, in what turned out to be an illegal transaction. Three years on, neither of the sons, trained as a doctor and engineer, had been able to find work in their professions or indeed in a white collar job, despite the nominal shift to privileging such skills. They said they could not understand how to access the 'powers' and ask for inclusion on the waiting list for citizenship or quota help. The sons work as porters in Almaty's huge semi-black market, Baraholka. The rest of the family stay at home. 'We would go back,' their mother said, 'but it's the shame that keeps us here. How can we go back to China saying our own motherland rejected us?'

Just as state officials say they cannot track, count or govern this unruly, excessive population, so too what appears in many oralman's accounts is their difficulty in reading the state, both literally, and in terms of what and who it stands for. Bureaucratic documents have only recently been in Kazakh as well as Russian, but are still in Cyrillic. The rapidity of legal changes and requirements for quota eligibility have left many confused. The inability to read the state means families such as the Chinese family exist in limbo. They are unable to move spatially: poverty and shame keep them in place, but there is also a sense of being in a dead end. For such families, this indeterminate, paperless existence, neither in nor out of the law is experienced not as capacity for entrepreneurial freedom, as for some 'mankurts', but as spatial and temporal constraint. Anara's litany suggests nostalgia for an orderly past that seems to have vanished to be replaced by an incomprehensible system.

Such has been the disillusionment that some oralman, usually, but not only, Mongolian Kazakhs, have returned to their host country or continue to move between Kazakhstan and

the country they moved from, keeping alive complex networks of kin and living across borders (Werner and Barcus, 2015). It is worth highlighting here that many, though not all, Mongolian Kazakhs continued to be nomadic herdsmen during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. More than most oralman, therefore, they seem to embody the traditional past that is celebrated in Kazakh government-sponsored films, billboards and National Strategies, and sometimes mocked by other Kazakhs and indeed non-Kazakhs. They have also attracted most academic attention (e.g. Finke, 2013; Finke and Sancak, 2005; Diener, 2009; Genina, 2015, Barcus and Werner, 2017). But the trajectories and experiences of such oralman can be a world away from urban secondary school teachers and engineers who have relocated from Uzbekistan, China or further afield. Moreover, while most oralman (61.6%) have come from Uzbekistan, the second largest group (14.2%) from China, Kazakhs from Mongolia comprize 9.2% (Ministry of Healthcare, 2014). Nevertheless, this small group has come to stand, in national and demotic imaginaries, for all oralman as an undifferentiated group.[16] The category (or 'whole') of 'oralman', and indeed Kazakhs as singular group in the past, has taken on the characteristics of the part. This then speaks to the tendency of categories to flatten out difference and make the infinitely variable (and thus indeterminate) limited and knowable.

In some places oralman from different countries have gathered together. Baibesik (meaning 'cradle' in Kazakh) is one such deliberate community. In 1999, Kairat, a young Mongolian Kazakh set up an NGO, 'Asar' ('co-operation' in Kazakh), to help oralman. He petitioned Almaty's akimat for land for 185 families, which was finally allocated in 2002, an hour's walk away from the city's edges. By 2005, there were forty families, still lacking roads and utilities. Most families had no papers. Those who worked, walked to and from Baraholka, the men working as porters, women at a variety of jobs in the markets. Those with contacts, worked in construction over the summer. Most children did not attend school, many of the older generation never left the settlement, unable to communicate, fearful of being caught and deported.

For some, there was a sense of having come to a point of rest. Those among the older generation from China, who had hoped to return to where their ancestors were buried in north

Kazakhstan, said that now they were content to stay where they were, acknowledging they were unlikely ever to make the journey. Complex tales from younger couples of how they had decided to move either ended when they moved to Baibesik, or constructed Baibesik as a fixed point in a kin network that stretched across Kazakhstan and other countries.

Aygul, a chatty, effervescent thirty-year old, described how her husband first travelled to Almaty from Uzbekistan for informal seasonal construction work in the 1990s. The next year she had accompanied him to see whether or not she wanted to move her young family there, her grandparents caring for the children while she was away. 'To and fro we went' she laughed, 'trying to decide where to go and who we should be.' Eventually, as Uzbekistan shut Kazakh language schools and it became harder for non-Uzbeks to find work they decided to settle in Kazakhstan but were unable to get a quota.

Eventually, they brought their children, building their house in Baibesik, delighting in the people they found. 'Here,' said Aygul, 'we work together and help each other. We've become a community. We have celebrations together. We have our own council. We're hyphenated Kazakhs![17] We have no need to go anywhere else, we don't need or want the Akimat here, and we don't want to live in the city. Here we're independent.' She also described an intricate household economy involving remittances, gifts and regular returns to Uzbekistan for family celebrations. The community was based on a shared experience of exclusion, as well as daily life, the rainbow element of the community as much as Kazakh ethnicity bringing them together. Her peers were similarly pragmatic, some wishing they had citizenship rights, but ambivalent about further attention from the state.

Conclusion: excess, indeterminacy, recognition – and determining wholes

How then do we account for these shifting nuances of this simultaneous welcome and rejection? I suggest that what emerges from these various mutating policies, plans, performances, practices and discourses is a series of indeterminacies in different registers,

some of which appear through the conflation of different levels, times and places. Each makes clear apprehension difficult. Together they provoke an excess of meaning.

First, the plethora of legal definitions and entailments of what it is to be an oralman, as well as the mutable quota arrangements, let alone the velocity with which they have changed, have baffled many oralman and citizens. Added to this, corrupt, or at any rate obscure, practices on the part of many Committees charged with implementing help offered to quota oralman have added to difficulties in understanding what has to be done in order to obtain official help and support. It is not only oralman who face such difficulties (Alexander, 2018). A common phrase used by Almaty's citizens is that 'the law has only been written so far', indicating with a hand gesture how laws stop short of detail. There is therefore considerable latitude for local officials to interpret or indeed misinterpret the law. This echoes Gandolfo's discussion of the constant unmaking or denial of form in a Peruvian state office as a mode of disabling encounter (2013). Indeterminacy can become an expression of power in encounters between local state officials and petitioners. For many oralman, the state is experienced as being unreadable and capricious to be supplicated or simply avoided. But as the ethnography suggests, the state is not uniformly illegible. Despite external definitions of oralman, there is no singularity in this group. They have been in different countries for different periods, some can marshall education, kin and connections to navigate bureaucratic waters; others experience only imperturbability, unconcern and silence.

Second, modes of identifying oralman as Kazakhs have troubling consequences. Dirt, as Douglas puts it (1966), is matter out of place. Daily small practices from scrubbing a floor to enforcing 'homeland security' represent the ongoing labour needed to keep things in order by keeping out the impure. Douglas' insight was that dirt is a relative category not an intrinsic characteristic. As the Introduction to this volume observes, the interstitial anomalies on which Douglas focuses are analytically elided with questions of excess and indeed other kinds of anomalies even though they speak to different kinds of threat to order.

It is worth dissecting the tropes of rejection here as several relate to how oralman are treated and represented. Certainly figures are deployed that are commonly used for outsiders: dirt

and bad smells evoke a sense of disgust. But other tropes are not simply shibboleths marking insiders/outsiders. The very 'traditional' elements that are celebrated in state-sponsored performances and on huge billboards are simultaneously rejected as ill suited to a modern Kazakhstan.

This is the 'problem' with the oralman. By embodying all those characteristics that are so readily and publicly performed, the oralman appear to *over*fulfil conventional markers for inclusion and exclusion: religion, traditional knowledge, linguistic capacity. Classification is binary. Linnean taxonomies, for example, move through binary, ranking measures to define organisms with increasing precision. Even when correspondence to a category's characteristics is along a range or to a degree, there is still a motion towards a cut-off point: all those above a certain marker are 'in', the others out. The logical entailment of the apparently simple notion that oralman have greater purity than Kazakhs who remained, brings excess via a kind of fuzzy categorization *within* the category of being Kazakh. This is more than the threat of something that does not fit a structural system, it destroys the system from within.

Once the oralman are identified as somehow more pure or authentic than acculturated Kazakhs then the latter, by implication, become lesser Kazakhs and, on a nationalist reckoning, less entitled to the rights signified by blood and land discourses. Some Kazakh academics made this explicit, calling for positive discrimination in favour of oralman representation in senior political posts. The oralman often embody, in daily practice and appearance, characteristics that the state ritually performs in particular set-aside spaces and times, conflating quite different orders of the symbolic and the mundane. At the same time they are caricatured as possessing extra, unwanted characteristics of boorish hicks. They are thus 'more' than Kazakh in two senses: a greater degree or intensification of 'Kazakh' qualities on the one hand, and a co-presence of those same qualities and mannerlessness on the other. Such twofold indeterminacy threatens rights on a nationalist score, for those who are 'less' Kazakh, but also jeopardizes the imagined community of cultured, urban, professional citizens.

This might seem simply to rehearse familiar tensions between indigenous populations versus newcomers, rural versus urban populations, and those who left and those who stayed behind. But the returnee is both more and less than the indigene. More because, as John Berger so beautifully captures in *The Seventh Man*, they have acquired a patina of elsewhere, and less because they went away. At times, this 'elsewhere' seems to have altered them physically—beyond recognition.

There are further confusions. The narrative line disturbed by this revivification of the past is the continuing Soviet-flavoured discourse of modernity and Progress. The past and tradition are necessary for the dialectical progress of history, but they only have value in place and in time. The repatriates share the genealogy that is officially celebrated and this is what makes them so problematic, because they do not seem to share the subsequent path of development to the point where common culture overwrites shared blood, re-clothing Soviet idioms of modernity in a Kazakh guise. The past that has come back to haunt urban citizens disrupts stories of modernity, moving forward and becoming a global economic player. These are uncanny citizens, simultaneously familiar and strange, out of time as much as out of place. To paraphrase Fabian (2014), the oralman's value to a nationalist state are as objects in the 'there and then'. As simultaneous subjects in the 'here and now' they disturb formal narratives of successive, forward-propelled movements. Different times bleed into each other. The past resists containment. For some oralman, being out of time, is experienced as painful suspension, unable to change their situation as they wish.

For Julia Kristeva, in her writing on estrangement, what is most fearful in the figure of the stranger is the recognition of that same quality in ourselves, the fundamental estrangement and lack of integration of the self (2009). This gives us a way of thinking about the repudiation of many of these oralman who do not fit the image of a new, urban Kazakhstan. The oralman provoke an acute crisis of recognition, laying claim to the same rights of blood and land, but showing alternative trajectories, different—and unwanted—facets of the present collective whole. Kristeva dwells particularly on the foreigner's position between and within languages: the repatriates speak and do not speak the same language, they are—and often are visibly not—contemporary Kazakhs in the sense that prevails in the self-

consciously Eurasian, ‘progressive’ cities of Almaty and Astana, the former and current capitals. But otherwise, the oralman cannot be seen as strangers. For Simmel (1971), the stranger has a different origin and is in a group but not of it. The oralman are the very opposite. They share an origin and are of but wholly in a group. They are simultaneously in and out of place.

The final merging of distinct orders appears via the distinction between people at the level of populations, and as individuals. Or, to put it another way, the tension oralman incarnate is one of collapsed scale: at the level of a population, the oralman are welcomed and wanted to boost number of Kazakh nationals, but in person they provoke the NIMBY argument. Nationalism, at the level of everyday living, is very different from grand politics. Abstract selected qualities are required but, as people, oralman become excessive. Scaled-up abstraction reduces humanity twice-over. Metaphors of less-than-human fluid mass meet partially-precise demographic categories on which population counts are based.

The fragmentary logic of state classification separates the abstract quality of a number from the actual entailments of a full citizen, a person: work, housing, healthcare. These demands appear excessive, famously summed up by the German playwright Max Frisch on the 1960s’ gastarbeiter programme, ‘We asked for workers; we got people instead’. Seen through Herzfeld’s lens of bureaucratic indifference, this is the logic that can reduce bureaucrats to ‘humorless automatons’ (1991: 1) and also classify people as insiders and outsiders on the basis of rigidly-bounded categories, rather than shared humanity, or shared alienation in Kristeva’s terms. The irony is that whereas Herzfeld’s account also shows how, in the Greek state, idioms of blood and kinship are objectified into bureaucratic taxonomies of pollution and exclusion in pursuit of the nation-state. In Kazakhstan, the distance between politico-legal discourse and practice is such that while the left hand extols a civic, multiethnic state, the right hand practices ‘Kazakification’ (Sarsembayev, 1999) and division between different kinds of Kazakh.

Each of these narratives of belonging evokes different social wholes or totalities, which are incommensurate and shaped by different temporalities and levels. The awkward presence of

the oralman reveals state narratives as no more than contingent, selective patchworks, holding moments together.

Government strategic plans for the nation, together with the eclectic forms of state-sponsored media and material culture, are profoundly influenced by a teleological vision that echoes revolutionary logic, even as it rejects the previously envisaged destination. More than rejection, there is a fear of the return of repressed elements of the Soviet period, just as Ukrainian events brought the past back into the present. A similar echo plays through Anara's appeal to the powers, where Soviet and post-Soviet states merge into one unreadable aphasic authority that still arches across national borders. The mobile homeland of those who vivify the in-betweeness and multiplicity of trans-nationalism, as well as communities such as Baibesik, speak rather to a sociality built on praxis not telos. As such the work of constantly remaking kin and community belongs in a time and a mode that slip unnoticed between the counting mechanisms and fixed points of origin and destiny of the state. State discourse repeatedly emphasizes that the nation-state of Kazakhstan is the cradle of Kazakh civilization. But, by naming their community 'cradle' in Kazakh, Baibesik's *sans papieres* suggest their settlement, within the larger system, is the authentic embodiment of Kazakhness in practice. The effect is to cast the larger totality into indecipherable obscurity, accentuating that indeterminacy is a perspectival artefact and throwing in to doubt who is kin and who the outsider, who the host and who the guest. That final challenge then is whose recognition counts.

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to Matt Candea, Matt Canfield, Michael Carrithers, Taras Fedirko, Joshua Reno, Minh Nguyen, Felix Ringel, Diana Vonnak and Thomas Yarrow for their extremely helpful comments. This has been given as a paper in many places (including Cambridge Senior Seminar, Thomas Hylland Eriksen's ERC Oslo conference 'Overflowing landfills, unwanted humans, and a new anthropology of waste', Newcastle Geography seminar, and the Max-Planck Institute of Social Anthropology's Colloquium) and has benefitted from

them all. In particular, I would like to thank Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Gunther Schlee whose thoughts have helped to shape this.

References

Aitmatov, C., 1983. *The Day Lasts More Than a Thousand Years*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Alexander, C. 2018. Homeless in the Homeland: housing protests in Kazakhstan, *Critique of Anthropology*, 32(2)

Alexander, C., 2004. The Cultures and Properties of Decaying buildings. *Focaal: European Journal of Anthropology*, 44: 48-60.

Alexander, C., 2007. Almaty: rethinking the public sector. In: C. Alexander, V. Buchli and C. Humphrey, eds. 2007. *Urban life in post-Soviet Asia*. London: Routledge. Pp.70-101.

Alexander, C., 2008. Waste under socialism and after: a case study from Kazakhstan. In: H. West and P. Raman, ed. 2008. *Enduring Socialism: Explorations of Revolution and Tranformation*. Oxford: Berghahn Books. Pp.148-168

Agamben, G., 2004. *State of Exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Agarin, T., ed., 2014. *When stereotype meets prejudice: antiziganism in European societies*. Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag.

Barcus, H. and Werner, C., 2017. Choosing to Stay: (Im)Mobility Decisions Among Mongolia's Ethnic Kazakhs. *Globalizations*, 14(1): 32-50.

Barnes, S., 2011. *Death and Redemption: The Gulag and the shaping of Soviet Society*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Basch, L., Glick Schiller, N. and Blanc C., 1994. *Nations Unbound: transnational projects, postcolonial predicaments and deterritorialised nation-states*. New York: Gordon and Breach.

Beacháin D., and Keylihan, R.,. 2013. Threading a Needle: Kazakhstan between civic and ethno-nationalist state building. *Nations and Nationalism*, 19(2), pp.337-56.

Berger, J. and Mohr, J., 1975. *The Seventh Man: Migrant Workers in Europe*. London: Verso.

Brown, A., 2005. The Germans of Germany and the Germans of Kazakhstan: A Eurasian *Volk* in the Twilight of Diaspora, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 57(4): 625-34.

Cerase, F., 1970. Nostalgia or disenchantment: considerations on return migration, in *The Italian Experience in the United States*. In: S. Tomasi and M. Engel, ed. New York: Centre for Migration Studies of New York.

Cerny, A., 2010. *Going where the grass is greener: China Kazaks and the Oralman immigration policy in Kazakhstan.* Practical Action Publishing.

Constable, N., 1999. At home but not at home: Filipina narratives of ambivalent returns, *Cultural Anthropology*, 14(2): 203-28.

Cummings, S., 1998. The Kazakhs: demographics, diasporas and 'return'. In: C. King and N. Melvin, ed. *Nations abroad: diapsora politics and international relations in the former Soviet Union.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Cunningham-Parmeter, K., 2011. Alien Language: immigration metaphors and the jurisprudence of others, *Fordham Law Review*, 79(4): 1545-98.

Darieva, T., 2005. Recruiting for the nation: post-Soviet transnational migrants in Germany and Kazakhstan. In: E. Kasten, ed. *Rebuilding Identities: pathways to reform in Post Soviet Siberia*. Berline: Dietrich Reimar Verlag, pp153-72.

Das V. and D. Poole. 2004. *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.

Diener, A. 2015. Assessing potential Russian irredentism and separatism in Kazakhstan's northern oblasts, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 56: 469-92.

Diener, A. 2009. *One Homeland or two? The Nationalization and Transnationalization of Mongolia's Kazakhs*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

Diener, A., 2005. Problematic Integration of Mongolian-Kazakh Return Migrants in Kazakhstan. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 46(6): 465–78

Dufoix, S., 2008. *Diasporas*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Eisenstadt, S., 1954. *The absorption of immigrants: A comparative study based mainly on the Jewish community in Palestine and the State of Israel*. London: Routledge Kegan Paul.

Engle Merry, S., 2016. *The seductions of quantification: measuring human rights, gender violence, and sex trafficking*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Fabian, J., 2014. *Time and the Other*: *How Anthropology Makes its Object*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Finke, P., 2013. Historical Homelands and Transnational Ties: the Case of the Kazak *Oralman. Zeitschrift für Ethnologie,* 138(2): 175-94

Finke, P. and Sancak, M., 2005. Migration and Risk-Taking. A Case Study from Kazakstan. In: L. Trager, ed. *Migration and Economy. Global and Local Dynamics.* Walnut Creek (CA): Altamira. Pp. 127-61

Foucault, M., 2003. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*. New York, NY: Picador

Flynn, M., 2003. Returning Home? Approaches to Repatriation and Migrant Resettlement in Post-Soviet Russia. In: T. Ohliger and R. Munz, eds. *Diasporas and Ethnic Migrants*. London, Portland: Frank Cass.

Gandolfo, D., 2013. Formless: A Day at Lima's Office of Formalization, *Cultural Anthropology*, 28(2): 278-98.

Genina, A., 2015. Claiming Ancestral Homelands: Mongolian Kazakh Migration in Inner Asia, PhD., University of Michigan.

Grant, B., 2001. New Moscow Monuments, or, States of Innocence, *American Ethnologist*, 28(2): 332–62.

Greenhalgh, S., 2010. *Cultivating Global Citizens: Population in the Rise of China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Herzfeld, M., 1991. *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*. New York: Berg.

Isaacs, N. 2016. Cinema and Nation-Building in Kazakhstan. In: N. Isaacs, and A. Polese, eds. *Nation-Building and Identity in the Post-Soviet Space: New Tools and Approaches*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Ismagambetov, T., 2009. Oralmans or compatriots? A new raise of old question. Available at: Better.kz.

Kazakhstan Human Rights n.d. *Rights of the Oralman*.
Available at: http://kazakhstanhumanrights.com/humanrightsanddemocracy/rights-of-the-oralman/

Kendirbaeva, G., 1997. Migrations in Kazakhstan past and present. *Nationalities Papers*, 25(4): 741-51.

King, R., Christou, A., and P. Levitt, eds. 2015. *Links to the Diasporic Homeland: Second Generation and Ancestral 'Return' Mobilities*. London: Routledge.

Kristeva, J., 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York. NY: Columbia University Press.

Kristeva, J., 1991. *Strangers to Ourselves*. New York: Columbia University Press

Kudaibergenova, D., 2015. The ideology of development and legitimation: beyond 'Kazakhstan 2030'. *Central Asian Survey*, 34(4): 440-55.

Kuşçu, I., 2008. *Kazakhstan's oralman project: a remedy for ambiguous identity*, Ph.D. Indiana University.

Laruelle, M., 2016. Which Future for National-Patriots? The Landscape of Kazakh Nationalism. In: M. Laruelle, ed. *Kazakhstan in the Making: Legitimacy, Symbols, and Social Changes*. Lanhan, Boulder: Lexington Books.

Laruelle, M. and Peyrouse, S., 2004. *Les Russes du Kazakhstan. Identités nationales et nouveaux États dans l'espace post-soviétique*. Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose.

Laszczkowski, M., 2016. *'City of the Future': Built Space, Modernity and Urban Change in Astana.* Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Markowitz, F., and Stefansson, A., 2004. *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return*. Lanham, Boulder: Lexington Books.

Mendikulova, G., 1997. *Istoricheskie sud'by kazakhsko diaspory: Pro skhozhdenie i razvitie*. Almaty: Ghylym

Nagel, J., 1994. Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture. *Social Problems*, 41(1): 152-76.

Nelson, D., 2015. *Who Counts?: The Mathematics of Death and Life after Genocide*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

O'Brien, G., 2003. Indigestible Food, Conquering Hordes, and Waste Materials: Metaphors of Immigrants and the Early Immigration Restriction Debate in the United States. *Metaphor and Symbol*, *18*(1): 33–47.

Ohliger, R. and Munz, R., 2003. Diasporas and Ethnic Migrants in Twentieth-Century Europe: A Comparative Perspective. In: R. Ohliger and R. Munz, eds. *Diasporas and Ethnic Migrants: Germany, Israel and Post-Soviet Successor States in Comparative Perspective*. London, Portland: Frank Cass.

Oka, N., 2013. *A Note on Ethnic Return Migration Policy in Kazakhstan: Changing Priorities and a Growing Dilemma*. IDE Discussion Paper, 3. Chiba: Institute of Developing Economies.

Pianciola, N., 2001. The Collectivization Famine in Kazakhstan, 1931–1933. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 25(3-4): 237-51.

Popravko, I., 2013. Identity and Conflict at the Borders: Adaptation of Oralmans in East Kazakhstan. Tomsk: Laboratory for Social and Anthropological Research.

Reeves, M., 2014. *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia*. Cornell and Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Rudnytskyi, O., Levchuk, N. Wolowyna, O. Shevchuk, P. and Kovbasiuk, A., 2015. Demography of a man-made human catastrophe: The case of massive famine in Ukraine 1932-1933. *Canadian Studies in Population*, 42: 53–80.

Ryan, C., 2013. Regimes of waste: Aesthetics, politics, and waste from Kofi Awoonor and Ayi Kwei Armah to Chimamanda Adichie and Zeze Gamboa. *Research in African Literatures,* 44(4): 51-68.

Sanders, R., 2016. *Staying at home: Identities, Memories and Social Networks of Kazakhstani Germans*. Oxford: Berghahn.

Sancak, M., 2007. Contested Identity: Encounters with Kazak Diaspora Returning to Kazakhstan. *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 25(1): 85-94.

Satpayev, D. and Umbetaliyeva, T.,. 2015. The protests in Zhanaozen and the Kazakh oil sector: Conflicting interests in a rentier state, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 6(2): 122-9.

Schatz, E., 2004. *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of "Blood" in Kazakhstan and Beyond*. Washington DC: University of Washington Press.

Schneider, J. and Crul, M., 2010. New insights into assimilation and integration theory: Introduction to the special issue. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33(7): 1143-8.

Simmel, G., 1950. The Stranger. In: K. Wolff, ed. *Georg Simmel: On Individuality and Social Forms*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 143–50.

Stedman Jones, G., 2013. *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society*. London: Verso Books.

Turner, S., 2005. Suspended Spaces—Contesting Sovereignties in a Refugee Camp. In: T. Blom Hansen and F. Steppaut, eds. *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

The Ministry of Health Care and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2016. For 25 years more than 957 thousand oralman have arrived to Kazakhstan, Available at: http://www.mzsr.gov.kz/en/content/25-years-more-957-thousand-oralman-have-arrived-kazakhstan-wwwzakonkz-february-9-2016

UNDP. 2006. *Status of Oralmans in Kazakhstan*. Almaty: UNDP.

Werner, C. and Barcus, H., 2015. The Unequal Burdens of Repatriation: A Gendered Analysis of the Transnational Migration of Mongolia's Kazakh Population. *American Anthropologist*, 117(2): 257-71.

Westren, M., 2012. Nations in Exile: "The Punished Peoples" in Soviet Kazakhstan, 1941-1961. Ph.D., University of Chicago.

Yessenova, S., 2005. Routes and Roots of Kazakh Identity: Urban Migration in Post-Socialist Kazakhstan. *The Russian Review*, 64(4): 2-20.

Bio

Catherine Alexander is Professor of Anthropology at Durham University, previously Goldsmiths, London. Her recent publications on questions of indeterminacy and waste include 'Moral Economies of Housing' in *Critique of Anthropology* (2018), co-edited with Insa Koch and Maja Hojer Bruun and *Economies of Recycling* (2012), co-edited with Joshua Reno. She also co-wrote the opening chapter 'What is waste' for the UK Government's Chief

Scientific Adviser's 2017 report on waste and has published several articles in Engineering journals on waste and recycling and written on third sector recycling.

[1] 'Assimilation' by contrast suggests making everyone the same (see Eriksen and Thorfeisson this vol.)

[2] See also Stedman Jones (2013) for similar metaphors in 19th-century London, Cunningham-Parmeter, (2011) for metaphors casting immigrants as alien and O'Brien (2003) on a variety of metaphors used for immigrants in 19th century America.

[3] See King and Christou, (2011); Markowitz, and Stefansson, (2004), Ohliger and Munz (2003) and Dufoix (2008) for a fuller discussion of 20th-century reverse diasporas.

[4] The 1989 census recorded Kazakhs as 37.8% of the population, barely more than the Russian fraction, but the first time since the 1939 census that Kazakhs were the largest group. In the 2014 census, the percentage of Kazakhs is 65.5%, a result of other groups emigrating as the number of Kazakhs increased.

[5] Although note Reeves' (2014) account of the continued mobility of many Central Asian borders, particularly between Uzbekistan, Kyrgystan and Tajikistan during and after the Soviet Union.

[6] I am not discussing clans here, another way in which the category of 'Kazakh' is divided (and which are further subdivided into 'ru's, approximately translated as tribes) and which can affect access to power and rights (Schatz 2004). Nor am I discussing other factors that throw doubt on counting methods and ethnic authenticity such as how nationality is 'chosen' if one parent is Kazakh and one another nationality. The crisp delineation of nationalities and land was determined by Stalin's 1920s' nationalities policy, which overwrote previous fluidity.

[7] The current President for example, was the First Secretary of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Kazakhstan in 1991 before moving smoothly into becoming the new Republic's President. He has been in power ever since. Born in 1940, he was 78 in 2018.

[8] *Ob immigracii. Zakon No1437 ot 26 ijunja 1992 g. Pravovoj spravochnik «Zakonodatel'stvo»*. – Almaty: Jurist, 2007.

[9] It continues 'Deprived of citizenship due to the acts of mass political repressions, unlawful requisition, forced collectivization, and other inhumane acts" (Oka, 2013).

[10] The government's own website on Human Rights in Kazakhstan details a series of legal violations of the oralman's rights (Kazakhstan Human Rights).

[11] My own survey in 2005 of 500 households in one settlement revealed no formally registered people. Assessments of actual numbers are hazarded on the basis of similar surveys by NGOs, notes kept by local polyclinics, occasional police checks. The sense of vast numbers of unregistered immigrants is accentuated by the 'invisible virus' discourse.

[12] Where one opposition casts the country as pure, the town as degenerate while the other contrasts urban civilization with brutish rural areas.

[13] *Mambet* is a derogatory term used by urbanites for village dwellers or those from south west Kazakhstan where often Russian linguistic capacity is poor, and people are said to be uneducated, unmannered and often of darker skin where paler skin is valued.

[14] The 2050 Strategy aims to use a modified Latin script.

[15] Visas are unnecessary for short stays from most countries, although registration at a residence is necessary within five days. Many thus overstay such visas and 'disappear' without formal residence or work permits.

[16] But note Popravko (2013) whose short report highlights differences between different oralman groups and differences between various 'waves' of return.

[17] She meant they were 'Mongolian Kazakhs' or 'Uzbek Kazakhs' or 'Chinese Kazakhs'.